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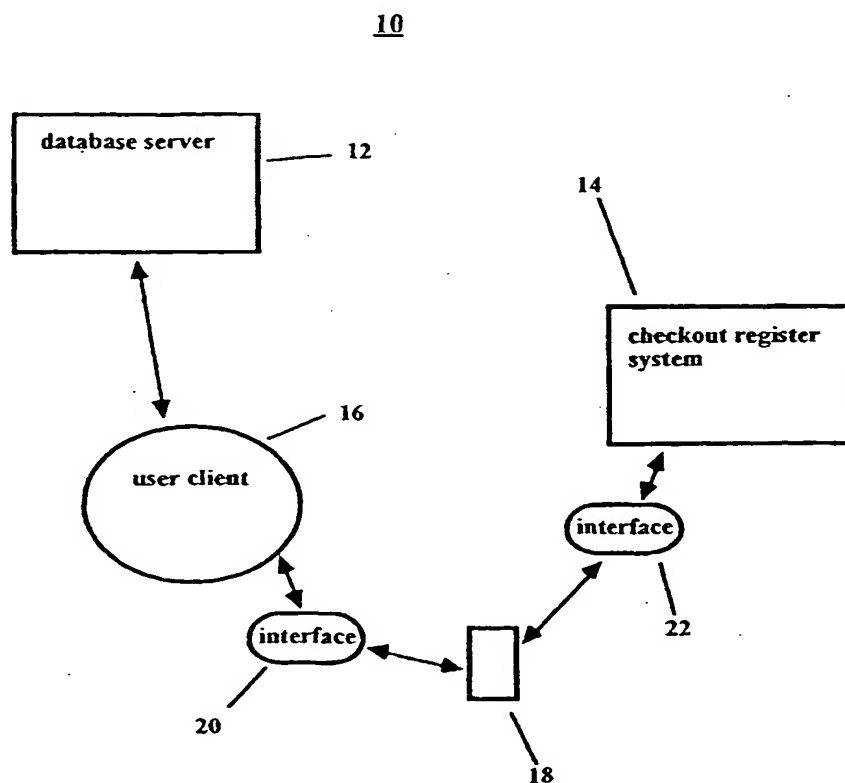
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(54) Title: SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR ACCUMULATING AND CONSOLIDATING BONUS POINTS



(57) Abstract: A system for granting bonus points to a plurality of consumers is provided. The system includes: (a) at least one database server (12) being configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product; (b) at least one checkout register system (14) being for providing said information pertaining to said product upon purchase of said product; and (c) a plurality of user clients (16) each being capable of independently communicating with said at least one database server (12) and said at least one checkout register system (14), each of said plurality of user clients (16) being operable by a user and being for relaying said information pertaining to said at least one database server (12) so as to grant the user with said predetermined value of bonus points.

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SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR ACCUMULATING AND CONSOLIDATING BONUS POINTS

FIELD AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to systems and methods which enable a consumer of goods to accumulate and consolidate bonus points and as such to enjoy benefits not providable by traditional coupons or credit card bonus points systems.

A traditional coupon is a detachable portion of a certificate, ticket, label, advertisement, or the like, entitling the holder to benefits which are typically provided in the form of a gift or a discount, or to entry in a raffle or a contest, etc. However, traditional coupons are typically limited in the type of benefits they entitle a holder.

In the past years, the concept of coupons has broadened in order to encourage the use of credit cards and charge accounts. Thus, credit companies provide credit card users with bonus points according to the amount and/or type of credit consumed thereby, whereas the users are free to trade some or all of the bonus points at their disposal into gifts, aerial mileage, discounts for certain goods, etc., according to a list of a plurality of offered benefits, each of which has a dedicated bonus points value associated therewith. Thus, the versatility and therefore attractiveness of the credit card bonus points system is far superior over that of traditional coupons.

While the credit companies bonus points system encourages users to consume credit, no equivalent system which enjoys such versatility and attractiveness exists for encouraging consumer purchasing regardless of the payment method used for a product purchase or the mode through which purchase is made.

In addition, although the use of credit cards simplifies the process of bonus point accumulation by a consumer, it typically does not provide additional benefits

to the product manufacturer. For example, to conduct promotional sales, a product manufacturer needs to manufacture and distribute dedicated products. For example, a soft drink manufacturer typically needs to manufacture dedicated bottles, bottle labels or bottle caps which can be used by the consumer as entry means into raffles and the like. Due to their dedicated nature, such promotion items are typically a hassle to produce. In addition, since unsold promotional products cannot be resold to stores following the end of a promotional sale, such products generate losses for the manufacturer. Finally, these promotional items are oftentimes the target of in-store vandalism by consumers wishing to retrieve the dedicated promotional aspect of the product without having to purchase the product itself.

In addition, credit card bonus point systems are further limited in that bonus points can only be accumulated when purchases are effected via the credit provider's credit account. As such, a user cannot accumulate bonus points in cases where purchases are made via other payment means, such as for example, payments effected via cash or bank notes.

Furthermore, since on-line shopping is fast becoming a preferred shopping mode for consumers, and since, for security reasons, on-line shoppers are discouraged from using their credit cards as on-line payment means, the dedicated nature of credit card bonus point systems also precludes such systems from enabling users to accumulate bonus points when purchasing goods or services on-line.

There is thus a widely recognized need for, and it would be highly advantageous to have, a bonus points system which enjoys the versatility and attractiveness of the credit card bonus points system, which encourages consumption of goods other than credit regardless of the shopping mode or payment method and which is advantageous to both the product consumer and the product manufacturer.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a user, the system comprising: (a) at least one database server being configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product; (b) at least one checkout register system being for providing the information pertaining to the product upon purchase of the product; and (c) a plurality of user clients each being capable of independently communicating with the at least one database server and the at least one checkout register system, each of the plurality of user clients being operable by a user and being for relaying the information pertaining to the product to the at least one database server so as to grant the user with the predetermined value of bonus points.

According to further features in preferred embodiments of the invention described below, the system further comprising a plurality of portable storage devices each being at the disposal of a specific user, each of the plurality of portable storage devices being capable of receiving and storing the information associated with the product from the at least one checkout register system and further being capable of communicating the information stored therein to each of the plurality of user clients.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a user, the system comprising: (a) at least one database server being configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product; (b) at least one checkout register system being for communicating the information pertaining to the product to the at least one database server upon purchase of the product; and (c) a plurality of portable storage devices each being operable by a user, each of the plurality of portable storage devices being for receiving and storing the predetermined value of bonus points from the at least one database server following the purchase of the product.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the at least one checkout register system further serves for communicating the predetermined value of bonus points from the at least one database server to each of the plurality of portable storage devices.

According to yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a user, the system comprising: (a) at least one database server being configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product; (b) at least one vendor server being for generating the information pertaining to the product upon the purchase of the product and further being for communicating the information pertaining to the product to the at least one database server; (c) a plurality of user clients each being capable of communicating with the at least one vendor server for effecting a purchase of the product therefrom, such that upon the purchase of the product from the at least one vendor server, the at least one database server grants the user the predetermined value of bonus points.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the vendor server forms a part of the World Wide Web.

According to still another aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a plurality of users, the bonus points being associated with a plurality of products, each of the plurality of products being coded by a code, the system comprising: (a) a plurality of user clients being at a respective disposal of the plurality of users, each of the plurality of user clients including a code identifier operatively communicating therewith, the code identifier being capable of identifying the code of each of the plurality of products; and (b) at least one database server being in communication with each of the plurality of user clients upon establishing communication therewith, the at least one database server being configured so as to grant any one user of the plurality of users a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of any one of the plurality of products.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the code identifier described above is selected from the group consisting of an optical scanner, a bar-code reader, a magnetic code reader and a radiofrequency reader.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the code identifier described above communicates with a user client of the plurality of user clients via cord or cordless communication modes.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the code identifier described above is attached to, or integrated with, each of the plurality of user clients.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the information pertaining to the product includes information selected from the group consisting of product price, product description, date of purchase and time of purchase.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the product is associated with a promotional sale and further wherein the information pertaining to the product also includes information identifying the product as a promotional item.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the user is entitled to benefits associated with the promotional sale upon relaying the information pertaining to the product to the at least one database server.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments each of the portable storage devices also stores information pertaining to bonus points of a user thereof.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments each of the plurality of portable storage devices is a magnetic card.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments each of the plurality of portable storage devices is a smart card.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments each of the plurality of portable storage devices is a memory device selected from

the group consisting of a magnetic memory device, an optical memory device and an optical-magnetic memory device.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments each of the plurality of user clients is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer a cellular telephone and a PDA.

According to an additional aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of granting bonus points to a consumer, the method comprising the steps of: (a) providing a database server capable of granting a predetermined value of bonus points according to information associated with a product of a plurality of products; (b) providing a checkout register system capable of providing the information pertaining to the product upon purchase of the product; (c) communicating the information pertaining to the product from the checkout register system to a user client operated by the consumer; and (d) communicating the information pertaining to the product from the user client to the database server, such that the consumer is granted with the predetermined value of bonus points.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the step of communicating the information pertaining to the product from the checkout register system to the user client is effected by a portable storage device being operable by the consumer.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the step of communicating the information pertaining to the product from the user client to the database server is effected via a communication mode selected from the group consisting of dialup communication and a local area network communication.

According to yet an additional aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of granting bonus points to a consumer, the method comprising the steps of: (a) providing a database server capable of granting a predetermined value of bonus points according to information associated with a product of a plurality of products; (b) providing a vendor system capable of providing the information pertaining to the product upon purchase of the product; and (c)

communicating the information pertaining to the product from the vendor system to the database server, such that the consumer purchasing the product is granted with the predetermined value of bonus points.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the step of communicating the information pertaining to the product to the at least database server is effected via a communication mode selected from the group consisting of dialup communication and a local area network communication.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the vendor system is a checkout register system.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the vendor system is a vendor server forming a part of the World Wide Web.

According to yet an additional aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for granting bonus points to a consumer, the method comprising the steps of: (a) associating each of a plurality of products with a code; (b) operatively communicating between a user client of the consumer and a code identifier, the code identifier being capable of identifying the code of each of the plurality of products; (c) establishing communication between the user client and at least one database server being configured so as to cumulatively grant the consumers a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of any one of the plurality of products; (d) using the code identifier, identifying the code of at least one of a plurality of products purchased by the consumer and forwarding the code via the user client to the database server; and (e) cumulatively granting the consumer a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of the at least one of the plurality of products purchased by the consumer.

According to still an additional aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the system comprising: (a) at least one database server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N,

wherein N is an integer greater than one; and (b) at least one vendor system being for communicating a purchase of the product N to the at least one database server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to the benefit upon the purchasing.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the method comprising the steps of: (a) providing at least one database server, the database server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and (b) providing at least one vendor system, the vendor system being for communicating a purchase of the product N to the at least one database server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to the benefit upon the purchasing.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the vendor system is a vendor server forming a part of the World Wide Web.

According to still further features in the described preferred embodiments the vendor system is a checkout register system.

According to yet a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the system comprising: (a) at least one database server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and (b) at least one user client being for communicating a purchase of the product to the at least one database server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to the benefit upon communicating the purchase of the product to the at least one database server.

According to still a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the method comprising the steps of: (a) providing at least one database server, the database server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was

purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and (b) providing at least one user client, the at least one user client being for communicating a purchase of the product to the at least one database server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to the benefit upon communicating the purchase of the product to the at least one database server.

The present invention successfully addresses the shortcomings of the presently known configurations by providing bonus points systems and methods which enjoys the versatility and attractiveness of the credit card bonus points system, while encouraging consumption of goods other than credit regardless of the mode of purchase and enabling the consolidation of bonus points accumulated. In addition, the systems and methods of the present invention can also be advantageously used for conducting sales promotions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention is herein described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings. With specific reference now to the drawings in detail, it is stressed that the particulars shown are by way of example and for purposes of illustrative discussion of the preferred embodiments of the present invention only, and are presented in the cause of providing what is believed to be the most useful and readily understood description of the principles and conceptual aspects of the invention. In this regard, no attempt is made to show structural details of the invention in more detail than is necessary for a fundamental understanding of the invention, the description taken with the drawings making apparent to those skilled in the art how the several forms of the invention may be embodied in practice.

In the drawings:

FIG. 1 is a schematic depiction of a system according to one aspect of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a schematic depiction of a system according to another aspect of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a schematic depiction of a system according to still another aspect of the present invention; and

FIG. 4 is a schematic depiction of a system according to yet another aspect of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is of novel systems and methods which can be utilized to grant consumers benefit-convertible bonus points when purchasing goods or services from stores or on-line vendors. Specifically, the system and method of the present invention enable a consumer of goods or services to enjoy a wide range of benefits regardless of the payment method utilized to effect purchase of goods, or the mode though which purchases are made.

The principles and operation of the system and method according to the present invention may be better understood with reference to the drawings and accompanying descriptions.

Before explaining at least one embodiment of the invention in detail, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details of construction and the arrangement of the components set forth in the following description or illustrated in the drawings. The invention is capable of other embodiments or of being practiced or carried out in various ways. Also, it is to be understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein is for the purpose of description and should not be regarded as limiting.

As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows the phrase "bonus points" refers to a virtual gift which is convertible upon demand to an actual benefit such as goods, credit, Internet money and the like.

As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows the terms "goods" and "products" are used interchangeably and include, but are not

limited to, purchasable products or services, receipts receivable for such products or services, etc.

As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows the phrase "user client" includes, but is not limited to, personal computers (PC) having an operating system such as DOS, Windows™, OS/2™ or Linux; Macintosh™ computers; computers having JAVA™-OS as the operating system; and graphical workstations such as the computers of Sun Microsystems™ and Silicon Graphics™, and other computers having some version of the UNIX operating system such as AIX™ or SOLARIS™ of Sun Microsystems™; a PalmPilot™, a PilotPC™, Nokia Communicator™ or any other handheld device; or any other known and available operating system. The term further includes mobile cellular communicator devices, wireless application protocol (WAP) enabled mobile cellular telephone devices or mobile communication devices having, in addition to telephone properties, capabilities similar to those of a personal computer (PC) or a personal digital assistant (PDA).

As used herein, the term "Windows™" includes but is not limited to Windows95™, Windows 3.x™ in which "x" is an integer such as "1", Windows NT™, Windows98™, Windows CE™ and any upgraded versions of these operating systems by Microsoft Inc. (Seattle, Washington, USA).

Referring now to the drawings, Figure 1, illustrates one aspect of the system of the present invention which serves for granting bonus points to a user, and which is referred to herein as system 10.

System 10 includes at least one database server 12. Server 12 serves for granting a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product.

System 10 further includes at least one checkout register system 14. Register system 14 serves for providing information pertaining to a product upon purchase of the product. Thus, when a product is purchased through register system 14

information specific to the product is generated by register system 14.

It will be appreciated that as used herein checkout register system 14 refers to store checkout register stations each of which may also be in communication with a central computer system of the store. For example, a supermarket or a department store typically has such a central computer system which is in communication with each of the registers operating at that store.

System 10 further includes a plurality of user clients 16, one of which is shown in Figure 1. Client 16 is capable of independently communicating with database server 12 and with checkout register system 14. Preferably client 16 is a personal computer, Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) or a cellular telephone each capable of communicating with database server 12 through a communication network such as, for example, the Internet. Thus, communication between client 16 and database server 12 is preferably effected either through a dialup connection or through a local area network.

Client 16 is at the disposal of a consumer. As used herein in the specification and in the claims section that follows the term "consumer" or "user" includes one or more individuals having legitimate access to a specific user client, and a specific username for operating the user client. Thus, for the purpose of the present invention members of a family unit can in some applications be considered a single consumer.

Client 16 serves for relaying information pertaining to the product to database server 12. Such information relayed, thus entitles the user to a predetermined value of bonus points.

Database server 12 enables a consumer to accumulate bonus points regardless of the point of sale from which a purchase was made, regardless of the type of product providing it is credited with bonus points and regardless of the payment method used to effect purchase. In addition, database server 12 enables a consumer to consolidate bonus points accumulated from various purchases effected at various points of sale to thereby enjoy increased benefits.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention database server 12 is configured so as to allow any one consumer to select at least one benefit from a plurality of optional benefits, tradable for a predetermined value of bonus points. The benefits can be, for example, any of the benefits offered by credit companies as a trade for their bonus points, such as, but not limited to, free products or services, discount products or services, aerial mileage, etc. Alternatively, bonus points can be converted into credit or Internet money.

Database server 12 also manages a saving protocol which ensures to credit any specific consumer with bonuses entitled thereto and to keep the appropriate book-keeping of earned vs. spent bonuses. In addition, server 12 can also manage the bonuses of a user so as allow the accumulation of interest on accumulated bonus points.

Database server 12 preferably also includes sections which are accessible by the public and serve for advertising the system, its benefits, etc., and other sections which are accessible only by the users of the system, each of which has access to data pertaining to the users bonus points and the like.

According to another preferred embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, the information pertaining to the product includes information such as, but not limited to, product price, product description, date of purchase and time of purchase and any other information which may identify the product to database server 12. This information is generated by register system 14 upon purchase of the product. Typically this information is generated following receipt of a code, such as a bar-code, which is associated with the product.

According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention, and as described in more detail hereinbelow, the information pertaining to product also includes information identifying the product as a promotional item. In this case, when a user of system 10 purchases such a product and relays the information pertaining thereto to database server 12, the user is also declared eligible to a benefit associated with the specific purchase of this product.

According to another preferred embodiment of this aspect of the present invention system 10 further includes a plurality of portable storage devices 18, one of which is shown in Figure 1. Device 18 is at the disposal of the consumer and serves for receiving and storing information associated with the product from register system 14. Device 18 further serves for communicating the information stored therein to user client 16. To enable device 18 to communicate with client 16, system 10 further includes an interface 20 which is in communication with client 16. Such communication can be effected by any applicable communication mode, such as cord and cordless communication modes. The cordless communication mode selected can be, for example, infrared communication, microwave communication, sound communication radio communication or optical communication. As will be appreciated by one ordinarily skilled in the art, each of the above communication modes is well suited for transmission of the required data. Interface 20 is configured to interface with device 18 in a manner which enables the relaying of information pertaining to the product from device 18 to client 16.

Similarly, device 18 can communicate with register system 14. To this end, register system 14 also includes an interface 22 which is similar in construction and function to interface 20. It will be appreciated that since register system 14 can also include a computer terminal or a central computer system, either of which are in direct communication with the actual checkout register, communication with register system 14 can also imply communication with the central computer system which is in direct communication with a register.

According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention device 18 can also serve for storing bonus points granted by database server 12. Thus according to this embodiment of the present invention device 18 can also be used for the utilization of bonus points stored therein as means of payment at a point of purchase. Such a payment can be provided to register system 14 by utilizing interface 22 described hereinabove to upload information pertaining to the bonus points stored in device 18 to register system 14.

It will be appreciated that since device 18 can communicate with register system 14 and client 16, device 18 can also store information pertaining to a user thereof and thus become personalized or coded. Such information can be used to identify the user to both register system 14 and to client 16.

It will further be appreciated that since device 18 of this aspect of the present invention stores information of value which includes purchases made and bonus points received by a specific user, device 18 is preferably configured such that access to the information stored therein is restricted to the user by, for example, a personal identification number (PIN) and the like. In addition the personal identification number can also be used to grant a user communication access to both register system 14 and to client 16.

According to another preferred embodiment of this aspect of the present invention device 18 is a magnetic card. In this case, information received and stored by device 18 is preferably stored on a magnetic strip provided therein. Interfaces 20 and 22 are, in this case, magnetic card interfaces capable of downloading information from, and uploading information to, device 18. Many examples of magnetic card interfaces and magnetic card types are known in the art and as such no further detail is provided herein.

According to another preferred embodiment of this aspect of the present invention device 18 is a smart card.

Smart cards, also known as electronic cards are cards capable of storing and controlling more data than the ubiquitous magnetic strip cards, while remaining simpler in design than personal computer cards, known as PC Cards. Smart cards utilize integrated circuits, memories and even microprocessors embedded within a card the dimensions of which are typically similar to that of a standard credit card. Thus smart cards offer a versatile combination of relatively low cost with a high degree of ruggedness for a myriad of data transfer transactions. Smart card readers have been designed to accept a smart card and couple the smart card with for example a personal computer. For example, the use of a standard receptacle in the

computer, such as a PCMCIA slot provided for PC Cards, enables a smart card to communicate with a personal computer without the need for additional hardware. Examples of various types of smart cards and smart card readers, can be found in U.S. Pat. No. 5,955,722 to Kurt et al. and U.S. Pat. No. 5,955,021 to Tiffany III which are incorporated herein by reference.

Thus, it will be appreciated that in the case where device 18 is a smart card and client 16 is, for example, a personal computer configured with a PCMCIA slot, that such a slot can serve as interface 20. Since the computer(s) of a checkout register system are typically not provided with a PCMCIA slot, interface 22 communicating thereto can function similarly to a PCMCIA slot in this case and thus can provide a suitable interface for device 18.

As exemplified by U.S. Pat. No. 5,955,961, a smart card can also be provided with an emulated magnetic strip interface; in this case, interfaces 20 and 22 can be the standard magnetic card readers described hereinabove.

The smart card configuration of device 18 described above is particularly advantageous since due to its small size and large storage capacity, a smart card can be effectively and easily utilized by the present invention as an "electronic wallet".

According to another preferred embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, device 18 can include both a magnetic strip and a smart card chip and interface. For example, a magnetic card, such as a credit card, debit card or an ATM card can be modified or fabricated so as to include a chip memory and a dedicated interface thus enabling device 18 according to this embodiment to be utilized as both a credit card (via the magnetic strip interface) and a smart card (via a dedicated smart card interface). In this case, interfaces 20 and 22, preferably include both smart card and magnetic strip interfacing capabilities, such that when device 18 is inserted into, or swiped within interface 20 or 22, both the magnetic strip and the smart card interface are accessed. An interface capable of reading magnetic strips and smart card interfaces is exemplified by U.S. Pat. No. 5,679,945.

This configuration of device 18 and interfaces 20 and 22 is particularly advantageous since it enables consumers to pay for purchased goods (via the magnetic strip) and to receive and store bonus points (into the chip memory) with a single action. Credit cards which also include smart card capabilities can easily be fabricated by ordinarily skilled artisans using presently available technology.

It will be appreciated that device 18 can alternatively be of any portable device capable of downloading and uploading and storing information. As such, device 18 can be for example, any magnetic, optical or optical magnetic memory device. An example to a magnetic storage device which can be utilized in device 18 of the present invention is a RAM chip.

It will further be appreciated that since device 18 can be utilized to both receive and store bonus points, such device 18 can be utilized in a system devoid of the user operated client 16 described above.

Thus, according to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for granting bonus points to a user, which system is referred to herein as system 50.

As specifically illustrated in Figure 2, system 50 includes at least one database server 52 which is similar in function to database server 12 described above. As such, database server 52 is configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product.

System 50 also includes at least one checkout register system 54 which is similar in function to checkout register system 14 described above. Checkout register system 54 according to this aspect of the present invention is either included in a single operational unit which integrates the functions of database server 52 and checkout register system 14, or it directly or indirectly communicates with database server 52. In any case, checkout register system 54 is capable of communicating information pertaining to a product to database server 52 upon purchase of the product.

System 50 further includes a plurality of portable storage devices 56 (one shown in Figure 2). Device 56 can be any of the portable storage devices described above with respect to device 18. Device 56 according to this aspect of the present invention serves for receiving and storing predetermined value of bonus points from database server 52 following purchase of product. Thus, device 56 can accumulate and consolidate bonus points rewarded from purchases made by the user regardless of the purchase method, purchased product or point of sale from which the purchase was made.

Preferably, device 56 receives the bonus points via checkout register system 54 which communicates with database server 52.

Thus, in this case, checkout register system 54 receives and optionally stores the bonus points granted by database server 52, and communicates such bonus points to device 56 via for example an interface 58 which is similar in function to interface 22 described hereinabove.

Thus, according to this aspect of the present invention, bonus points granted by database server 52 are communicated to checkout register system 54 which in turn allows a user operating device 56 to receive and store such bonus in device 56 thereof.

It will be appreciated that since device 56 is capable of storing bonus points and since it is capable of interfacing with checkout register system 54, such device 56 can also be utilized to effect payment for purchased products.

Thus, this configuration of the system of the present invention is particularly advantageous since device 56 can be effectively and easily utilized as an "electronic wallet" without the need for separately communicating information to database server 52 via for example a user operated client.

It will be appreciated that the present invention can also be utilized by a user to accumulate and consolidate bonus points acquired from on-line purchasing.

Thus, according to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a system for granting bonus points, which system is referred to herein under as

system 70.

As specifically illustrated in Figure 3, system 70 includes at least one database server 72 which is configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product.

System 70 also includes at least one vendor server 74 which serves for generating information pertaining to the product upon a purchase of the product. Vendor server 74 further serves for communicating the information pertaining to the product to said at least one database server, via, for example, communication network 75.

System 70 further includes a plurality of user clients 76 (one shown in Figure 3) such as for example, a personal computer, a PDA, a cellular telephone or any other device capable of accessing communication network 75. User client 76 is capable of communicating with vendor server 74 via for example, a dialup connection or an area network (e.g., LAN, WAN).

User client 76 enables a user thereof to purchase products from vendor server 74. To this end, user client preferably operates a Web browser application for communicating with, for example, a Web site stored and provided by vendor server 74.

Herein, the term "Web browser" or "browser" refers to any software program which can display text, graphics, or both, from Web pages on World Wide Web sites.

Herein, the term site includes a specific address such as an Internet address which may designate, for example, a Web site which contains any number of Web pages or a single Web page.

Herein, the term "Web site" refers to at least one Web page, and preferably a plurality of Web pages, virtually connected to form a coherent group of interlinked documents.

Herein, the term "Web page" refers to any document written in a mark-up language including, but not limited to, HTML (hypertext mark-up language) or

VRML (virtual reality modeling language), dynamic HTML, XML (extended mark-up language) or related computer languages thereof, as well as to any collection of such documents reachable through one specific Internet address or at one specific World Wide Web site, or any document obtainable through a particular URL (Uniform Resource Locator).

Thus, when a user operating user client 76 purchases a product from vendor server 74, information pertaining to the purchased product is communicated from vendor server 74 to database server 72 and the user is granted a predetermined value of bonus points.

According to a preferred embodiment of this aspect of the present invention, user client 76 can also communicate with database server 72. Such communication enables a user of client 76 to access user specific information stored by database server 72, or to receive and optionally store the bonus points granted by, or accumulated in, database server 72.

Preferably, a user operating user client 76, is identifiable by database server 72 and/or vendor server 74, such that only a privileged user of system 70 is granted with bonus points following a purchase of a product from vendor server 74. Such identification can be effected via an IP address of user client 76, or it can be effected via user provided information which can include, for example, an ID and password specific to the user.

It will be appreciated that since database server 72 can communicate with any number of vendor servers 74, an on-line shopper can accumulate and consolidate bonus points for purchases made through any of such vendor servers 74.

It will be further be appreciated that bonus points accumulated by an on-line shopper can in turn be utilized thereby to purchase products on-line.

Figure 4 illustrates yet another aspect of the system according to the present invention which is referred to hereinbelow as system 100. System 100 serves for granting bonus points to a plurality of consumers of goods 102 (one is shown), coded by a code 104.

According to this aspect of the present invention, system 100 includes a plurality of user clients 106 (one is shown).

Each of user clients 106 according to this aspect of the present invention is at a respective disposal of one of a plurality of consumers. Each user client 106 is operatively communicating with a code identifier 108. As further detailed hereinunder, code identifier 108 is capable of identifying code 104 of each of the plurality of goods 102. For certain embodiments user client 106 and code identifier 108 can be integrated into a single operative device.

The communication between a specific code identifier 108 and a specific user clients 106 can be effected by any applicable communication mode, such as cord and cordless communication modes. The cordless communication mode selected can be, for example, infrared communication, microwave communication, sound communication radio communication or optical communication. As will be appreciated by one ordinarily skilled in the art, each of the above communication modes is well suited for transmission of the required data.

System 100 according to the present invention further includes at least one database server 120 (one is shown). Server 120 is in communication with each of one of the plurality of user clients 106 upon establishing communication therewith. It will be appreciated that communication can be established through a dialup connection, a local area network or any other communication mode suitable for interconnecting client 106 and server 120. Server(s) 120 are configured so as to grant any one consumer of the plurality of consumers a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of a code 104 of any one of the plurality of goods 102. It will be appreciated in this case that when such goods are purchased goods, purchase can be effected by any means, including, but not limited to, cash, check or charge.

According to a preferred embodiment of the present invention code identifier 108 is an optical scanner, whereas in this case code 104 is an optical code. The optical scanner can be selected from any class of optical scanners, such as, but not

limited to, laser optical scanners, LED optical scanners and CCD optical scanners. Further details relating to types of optical scanners are found in, for example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,640,002, which is incorporated by reference as if fully set forth herein. According to a preferred embodiment the optical scanner is a bar-code reader, whereas the optical code is a bar-code. The bar-code can be, for example, a linear bar-code, a circular bar-code, or a two dimensional bar-code, as for example described in the home page of Intelligent Bar-code Systems, Inc./Sunmax Corp. (see, <http://www.barcodesystems.com>).

According to another preferred embodiment of the present invention code identifier 108 is a magnetic code reader, whereas code 104 is a magnetic code. According to yet another preferred embodiment of the present invention code identifier 108 is a radiofrequency reader, whereas code 104 is a radiofrequency code. Such readers and codes are well known in the art and therefore require no further description herein.

In any case, code 104 is printed on, adhered onto and/or detachable from goods 102 and it can be identified by identifier 108. Alternatively, code 104 is printed on or adhered onto a code carrier which is packed with or within goods 102.

The operation of system 100 according to a presently preferred embodiment of the present invention is as follows.

A consumer purchases goods which are coded by bar-codes. Each of the goods is preferably coded by a unique bar-code which entitles the consumer to a certain value of bonus points. It should be noted that, according to this embodiment of the present invention, even identical products each having a unique and distinguishing bar-code. At his convenience, using a personalized (coded) bar-code reader and a user client 106, the user (i) scans the bar-codes of the purchased goods; and (ii) forwards the scanned information via the Internet or electronic mail (email) to database server 120.

It will be appreciated that software capable of translating a bar-code, or any other code, into alphanumeric characters code or a binary code are well known in the

art and are readily available from a plurality of suppliers.

Each bar-code is then associated with a predetermined value of bonus points according to an existing lookup table managed by database server 120.

The bonus points granted are then cumulatively added to a bonus points account associated with the personalized bar-code reader (i.e., with the consumer), thus enabling the accumulation and consolidation of bonus points

It will be appreciated that software for executing the above steps are either readily available or are readily programmable by those of skills in the art.

Finally, to prevent re-scanning of already scanned codes, the specific bar-codes are either marked as used or are deleted from the lookup table, such that re-scanning a scanned bar-code will not result in additional bonus points added to any account. For example, the bar-code scanner neutralizes or changes the code following scanning. Such neutralization or change can be effected by physically damaging the code in a way which is identifiable by the scanner. Such damage can be enacted by a scraping mechanism which scrapes the code or a portion thereof or alternatively by the application of a dye onto the code, e.g., via a dye dispenser activated upon scanning, which dye is identifiable by the scanner. In either case, a re-scan of the same code is rendered inoperative. It will be appreciated that preventative measures against the fraudulent use of the scanning device can also include protection against the use of forged (e.g. photocopied) bar codes. In the alternative, the software used in user client 106 and/or database server 120 memorizes read codes and prevent the re utilization of pre scanned codes.

Database server 120 preferably includes sections which are accessible by the public and serve for advertising the system, its benefits, etc., and other sections which are accessible only by subscribers of the system, each of which has access to data pertaining to the users bonus points and the like.

Various configurations of code identifier 108 can be utilized by this aspect of the present invention in order to prevent fraudulent use of system 100. For example, code identifier 108 can include a base communicating with a user client

106 and a remote identifier communicating with the base by, for example, remote communication, such as radio, infrared, or sound communication. The remote communication mode is designed so as to limit the operative distance between the base and remote identifier of code identifier **108** to a distance characterizing home cordless telephone systems, e.g., not more than about 50 meters.

Alternatively code identifier **108** or a portion thereof (e.g., the base) can be functionally integrated into user client **106** or attached thereto.

Code identifier **108** or a portion thereof can preferably includes a mechanism for identifying a surrounding characteristic. Such a mechanism can identify, for example, lighting which is unique to shops (e.g., fluorescent lighting), sound unique to shops, or a dedicated signal deliberately produced in a shop and which is designed to render code identifier **108** inoperative within a shop.

It will be appreciated that any of the above configurations of the system for granting bonus point according to the present invention can also be utilized for carrying out a promotional sale of a product.

Thus according to this aspect of the present invention the database server which grants bonus points to the user (database server **12**, **52**, **72** or **120** described hereinabove) also serves for declaring a purchaser eligible to a benefit upon the purchase of a product **N** (**N** is an integer greater than one, e.g., the 10th product, the 100th product, the 1,000th product the 10,000th product, the 100,000th product or the 1,000,000th product). It will be appreciated that the database server can also enable stores, on-line vendors, manufacturers or any other organizations to stage lotteries using the system of the present invention.

Thus promotional sales are conducted by the present invention as follows. Upon identifying a purchased product, the database server enumerates the product and compares it to a stored purchase number **N** for the product, which purchase number entitles the purchasing user to a benefit according to the promotional sale of the product. It will be appreciated that although independent register systems are capable of carrying out such a promotional sale at each point of sale independently,

no system exists with which a promotional sale can be co-conducted in a large number of stores on a nationwide basis.

It will be appreciated in this case, that since information pertaining to a promotional sale product is stored within the database server of the system of the present invention, such products need not be different physically than identical non-promotional products. This traverses the hassles and added expenses associated with the dedicated manufacturing of promotional sales items.

It will be appreciated that some or all of the embodiments described hereinabove for systems 10, 50, 70 and 100 can be integrated into a single system which can then provide all or some of the services described herein for these systems.

Thus, the present invention provides a system for granting bonus points and for conducting promotional sales which enjoys the versatility and attractiveness of the credit card system, and yet encourages consumption of goods other than credit regardless of payment methods or mode of purchase.

Thus, in sharp contrast to prior art systems, a consumer is rewarded for store checkout register purchases effected via cash, check or charge, or for on-line purchases effected via charge accounts, virtual money or the like.

This feature of the present invention enables a user to consolidate bonus points accumulated thereby, thus providing additional benefits not providable by prior art bonus point systems.

In addition to being advantageous to the consumer, the present invention also provides distinct advantages to manufacturers and vendors.

For example, the present invention allows manufacturers to conduct promotional sales without having to produce promotion-specific items which can be a hassle to produce and which oftentimes generate losses for the manufacturer or vendor.

In addition, the present invention enables to retrieve statistical information for a plurality of users to thereby produce a purchase profile for any particular

product, such as, for example, the number of times a specific product is purchased over a time period or at a particular time of the year. It will be appreciated in this case, that such statistical data can be valuable to a product manufacturer and/or a point of sale since this statistical data also includes information on a variety of products consumed by a specific identifiable user. In this case, personal profile information of each specific user is stored in the database server such that the purchase habits of the user can be correlated to a personal profile thereof.

Although the invention has been described in conjunction with specific embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alternatives, modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and broad scope of the appended claims. All publications, patents, patent applications disclosed therein and/or mentioned in this specification are herein incorporated in their entirety by reference into the specification, to the same extent as if each individual publication, patent, patent application was specifically and individually indicated to be incorporated herein by reference. In addition, citation or identification of any reference in this application shall not be construed as an admission that such reference is available as prior art to the present invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for granting bonus points to a user, the system comprising:
 - (a) at least one database server being configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product;
 - (b) at least one checkout register system being for providing said information pertaining to said product upon purchase of said product; and
 - (c) a plurality of user clients each being capable of independently communicating with said at least one database server and said at least one checkout register system, each of said plurality of user clients being operable by a user and being for relaying said information pertaining to said product to said at least one database server so as to grant the user with said predetermined value of bonus points.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein said information pertaining to said product includes information selected from the group consisting of product price, product description, date of purchase and time of purchase.
3. The system of claim 1, wherein said product is associated with a promotional sale and further wherein said information pertaining to said product also includes information identifying said product as a promotional item.
4. The system of claim 3, wherein the user is entitled to benefits associated with said promotional sale upon relaying said information pertaining to said product to said at least one database server.

5. The system of claim 1, further comprising a plurality of portable storage devices each being at the disposal of a specific user, each of said plurality of portable storage devices being capable of receiving and storing said information associated with said product from said at least one checkout register system and further being capable of communicating said information stored therein to each of said plurality of user clients.

6. The system of claim 5, wherein each of said portable storage devices also stores information pertaining to bonus points of a user thereof.

7. The system of claim 5, wherein each of said plurality of portable storage devices is a magnetic card.

8. The system of claim 5, wherein each of said plurality of portable storage devices is a smart card.

9. The system of claim 5, wherein each of said plurality of portable storage devices is a memory device selected from the group consisting of a magnetic memory device, an optical memory device and an optical-magnetic memory device.

10. The system of claim 1, wherein each of said plurality of user clients is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer a cellular telephone and a PDA.

11. A system for granting bonus points to a user, the system comprising:
(a) at least one database server being configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product;

- (b) at least one checkout register system being for communicating said information pertaining to said product to said at least one database server upon purchase of said product; and
- (c) a plurality of portable storage devices each being operable by a user, each of said plurality of portable storage devices being for receiving and storing said predetermined value of bonus points from said at least one database server following said purchase of said product.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein said at least one checkout register system further serves for communicating said predetermined value of bonus points from said at least one database server to each of said plurality of portable storage devices.

13. The system of claim 11, wherein each of said plurality of portable storage devices is a magnetic card.

14. The system of claim 11, wherein each of said plurality of portable storage devices is a smart card.

15. The system of claim 11, wherein each of said plurality of portable storage devices is a memory device selected from the group consisting of a magnetic memory device, an optical memory device and an optical-magnetic memory device.

16. The system of claim 11, wherein each of said plurality of portable storage devices also serves for effecting said purchase of said product.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein said purchase of said product is effected via bonus points stored by each of said plurality of portable storage

devices.

18. A system for granting bonus points to a user, the system comprising:
 - (a) at least one database server being configured so as to grant a predetermined value of bonus points upon identifying information pertaining to a product;
 - (b) at least one vendor server being for generating said information pertaining to said product upon said purchase of said product and further being for communicating said information pertaining to said product to said at least one database server;
 - (c) a plurality of user clients each being capable of communicating with said at least one vendor server for effecting a purchase of said product therefrom, such that upon said purchase of said product from said at least one vendor server, said at least one database server grants the user said predetermined value of bonus points.
19. The system of claim 18, wherein said user client is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, a PDA, a cellular telephone and a standard telephone.
20. The system of claim 18, wherein said information pertaining to said product includes information selected from the group consisting of product price, product description, date of purchase and time of purchase.
21. The system of claim 18, wherein said product is associated with a promotional sale and further wherein said information pertaining to said product also includes information identifying said product as a promotional item.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein the user is entitled to benefits associated with said promotional sale upon communication of said information pertaining to said product to said at least one database server.

23. The system of claim 18, wherein said vendor server forms a part of the World Wide Web.

24. A system for granting bonus points to a plurality of users, the bonus points being associated with a plurality of products, each of said plurality of products being coded by a code, the system comprising:

- (a) a plurality of user clients being at a respective disposal of the plurality of users, each of said plurality of user clients including a code identifier operatively communicating therewith, said code identifier being capable of identifying the code of each of the plurality of products; and
- (b) at least one database server being in communication with each of said plurality of user clients upon establishing communication therewith, said at least one database server being configured so as to grant any one user of the plurality of users a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of any one of said plurality of products.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein said at least one database server is further configured so as to allow any one user of the plurality of users to select at least one benefit from a plurality of optional benefits, each of said plurality of optional benefits is trade for a predetermined value of bonus points.

26. The system of claim 24, wherein said code identifier is selected from the group consisting of an optical scanner, a bar-code reader, a magnetic code

reader and a radiofrequency reader.

27. The system of claim 24, wherein said code identifier communicates with a user client of said plurality of user clients via cord or cordless communication modes.

28. The system of claim 24, wherein said code identifier is attached to, or integrated with, each of said plurality of user clients.

29. The system of claim 24, wherein each of said plurality of user clients is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, a PDA and a cellular telephone.

30. A method of granting bonus points to a consumer, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a database server capable of granting a predetermined value of bonus points according to information associated with a product of a plurality of products;
- (b) providing a checkout register system capable of providing said information pertaining to said product upon purchase of said product;
- (c) communicating said information pertaining to said product from said checkout register system to a user client operated by the consumer; and
- (d) communicating said information pertaining to said product from said user client to said database server, such that the consumer is granted with said predetermined value of bonus points.

31. The method of claim 30, wherein the step of communicating said information pertaining to said product from said checkout register system to said

user client is effected by a portable storage device being operable by the consumer.

32. The method of claim 30, wherein said step of communicating said information pertaining to said product from said user client to said database server is effected via a communication mode selected from the group consisting of dialup communication and a local area network communication.

33. A method of granting bonus points to a consumer, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a database server capable of granting a predetermined value of bonus points according to information associated with a product of a plurality of products;
- (b) providing a vendor system capable of providing said information pertaining to said product upon purchase of said product; and
- (c) communicating said information pertaining to said product from said vendor system to said database server, such that the consumer purchasing said product is granted with said predetermined value of bonus points.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein the step of communicating said information pertaining to said product to said at least database server is effected via a communication mode selected from the group consisting of dialup communication and a local area network communication.

35. The method of claim 33, wherein said vendor system is a checkout register system.

36. The method of claim 33, wherein said vendor system is a vendor server forming a part of the World Wide Web.

37. A method for granting bonus points to a consumer, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) associating each of a plurality of products with a code;
- (b) operatively communicating between a user client of the consumer and a code identifier, said code identifier being capable of identifying the code of each of the plurality of products;
- (c) establishing communication between said user client and at least one database server being configured so as to cumulatively grant said consumers a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of any one of said plurality of products;
- (d) using said code identifier, identifying the code of at least one of a plurality of products purchased by the consumer and forwarding the code via said user client to said database server; and
- (e) cumulatively granting the consumer a predetermined value of bonus points upon identification of the code of said at least one of said plurality of products purchased by the consumer.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein said at least one database server being further configured so as to allow the consumers to select at least one benefit from a plurality of optional benefits, each of said plurality of optional benefits is trade for a predetermined value of bonus points.

39. The method of claim 37, wherein said code identifier communicates with said user client via cord or cordless communication modes.

40. The method of claim 37, wherein said code identifier is attached to, or integrated with, said user client.

41. The method of claim 37, wherein said user client is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, a PDA and a cellular telephone.

42. A system for carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the system comprising:

- (a) at least one database server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and
- (b) at least one vendor system being for communicating a purchase of said product N to said at least one database server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to said benefit upon said purchasing.

43. The system of claim 41, wherein said vendor system is a vendor server forming a part of the World Wide Web.

44. The system of claim 42, wherein said vendor system is a checkout register system.

45. A method of carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing at least one database server, said database server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and
- (b) providing at least one vendor system, said vendor system being for communicating a purchase of said product N to said at least one

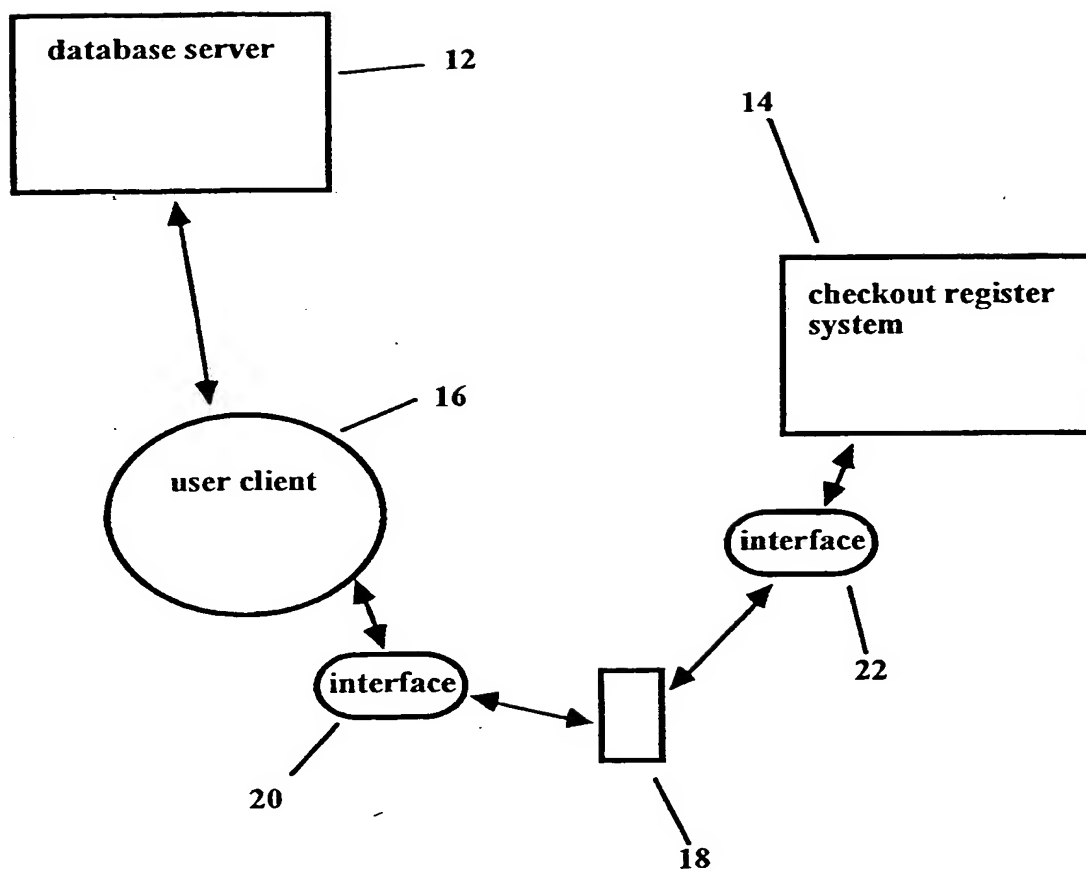
database server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to said benefit upon said purchasing.

46. A system for carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the system comprising:

- (a) at least one database server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and
- (b) at least one user client being for communicating a purchase of said product to said at least one database server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to said benefit upon communicating said purchase of said product to said at least one database server.

47. A method of carrying out a promotional sale of a product, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing at least one database server, said database server being configured so as to track and enumerate the number of times the product was purchased and further being for declaring eligibility of a purchaser to a benefit upon purchasing a product N, wherein N is an integer greater than one; and
- (b) providing at least one user client, said at least one user client being for communicating a purchase of said product to said at least one database server, such that the purchaser is declared eligible to said benefit upon communicating said purchase of said product to said at least one database server.

10**Figure 1**

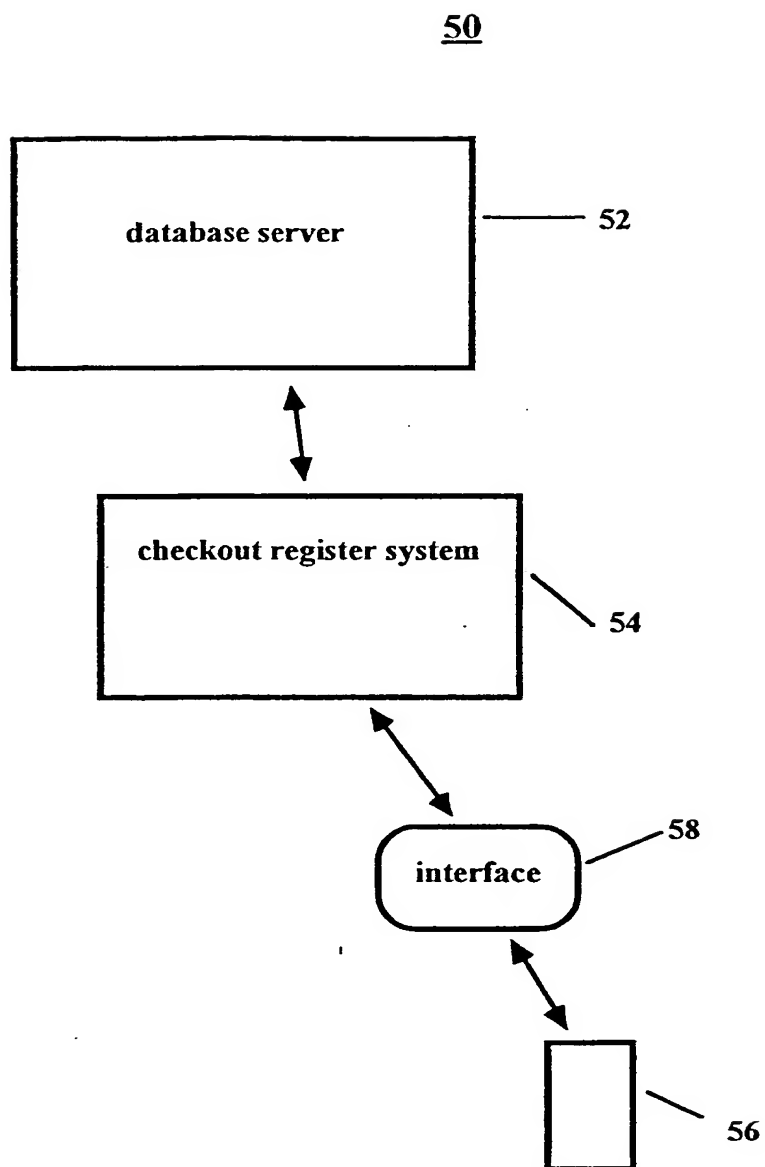


Figure 2

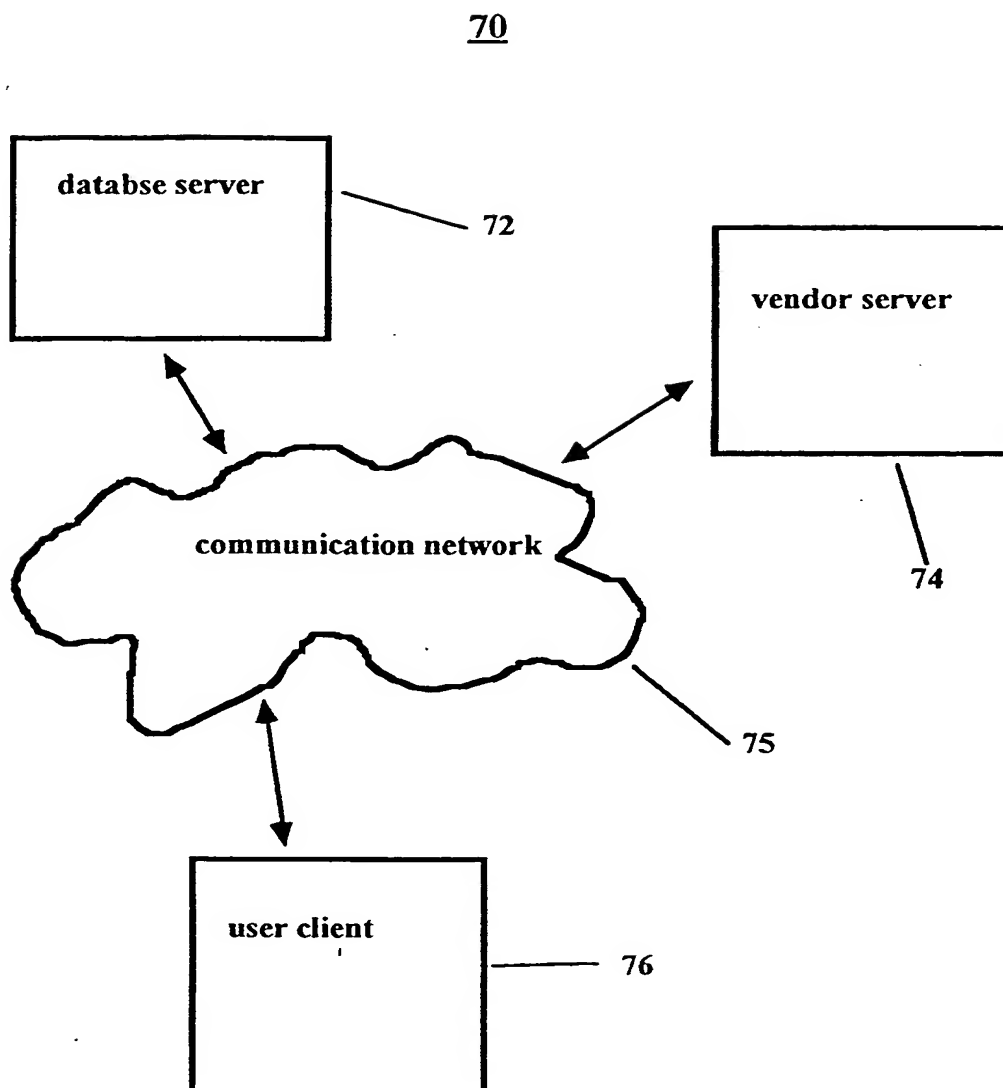


Figure 3

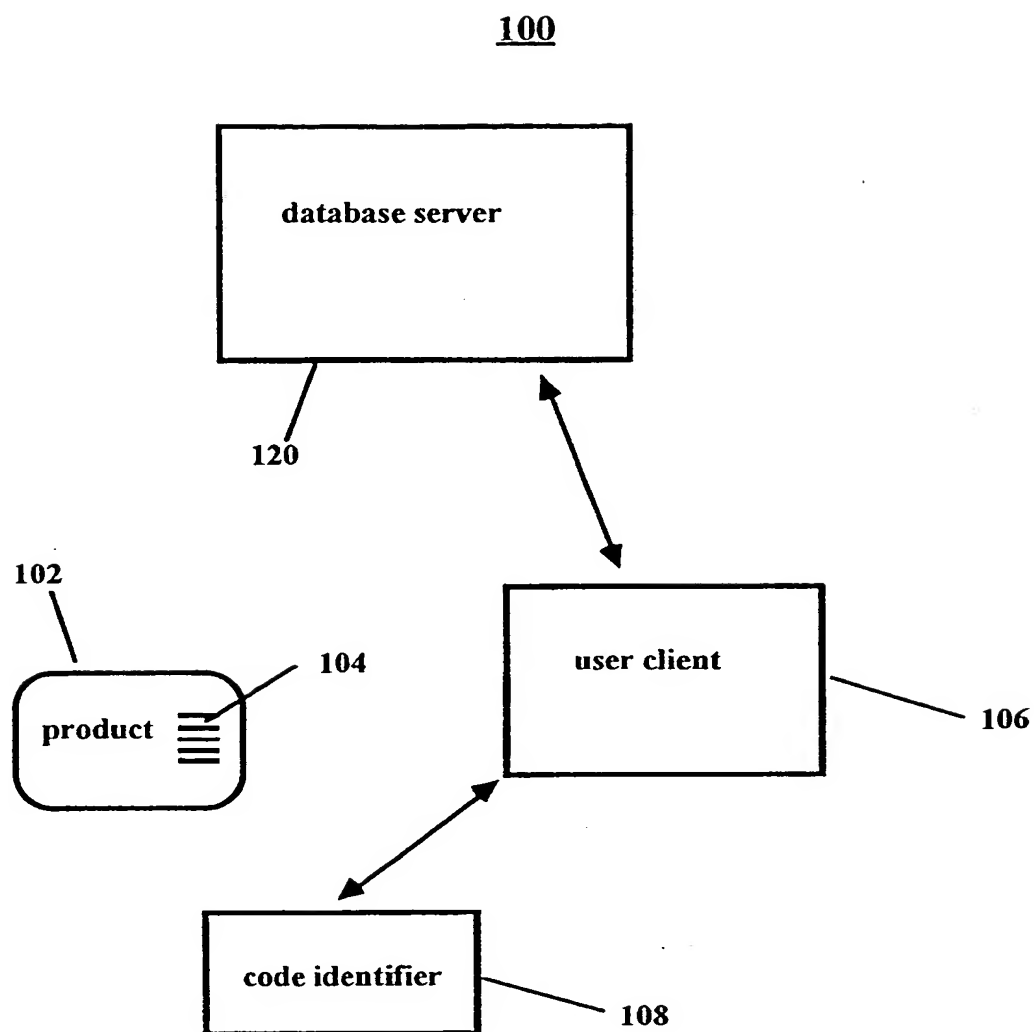


Figure 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/IL00/00473

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : G06K 15/00; G06F 7/20

US CL : 235/383,380,375

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
U.S. : 235/383,380,375

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim N
A	US 5,905,246 A (FAJKOWSKI) 18 MAY 1999 (18.05.1999), entire document	1-42, 44-47
A	US 5,923,016 A (FREDREGILL et al) 13 JULY 1999 (13.07.1999), entire document	1-42, 44-47
A	US 5,380,991 A (VALENCIA et al) 10 JANUARY 1995 (10.01.1995), entire document	1-42, 44-47

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

01 DECEMBER 2000 (01.12.2000)

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US

Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks
Box PCT
Washington, D.C. 20231

Facsimile No. (703)305-3230

Date of mailing of the international search report

08 JAN 2001

Authorized officer

JAMES TRAMMELL

Telephone No. 703-305-3900

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/IL00/00473

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of Item 1 of first sheet)

This international report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claim Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
2. ☒ Claim Nos.: 43
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
Claim 43 recites "The system of claim 41, wherein said vendor system". There is no antecedent basis for a vendor system in claim 41 or claim 37.
3. ☐ Claim Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of Item 2 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

☐
☐

The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.

No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.